

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

Bad Idea's Time has Passed

Although work to relieve congestion at Garden State Parkway toll plazas is well advanced, the notion of abolishing tolls altogether is dying a slow death. New Jersey's anti-toll zealots are kvetching about the latest improvements on the Garden State Parkway. New Jersey recently removed toll barriers at Raritan (north-bound) and Asbury Park (south-bound) to reduce congestion, while doubling the 35-cent toll at nearby plazas. Together with the Parkway's move to implement high-speed tolls at some plazas, reducing the overall number of on-highway plazas is a key component of the state's plan to **ease Parkway jams**.

But whether congestion was improving on the Parkway or not, the position of "Citizens Against Tolls" and like-minded groups is completely untenable. That's because New Jersey's **transportation fund is nearly bust**, while the need for transportation investment continues to grow. The state's leaders will soon face the need to raise new transportation revenue, and are in no position to eliminate existing sources of highway upkeep. Parkway tolls have not risen since 1980s, and at this point do not cover the cost of operating and maintaining the state-spanning highway. If anything, Parkway tolls should be hiked in the near future.

Citizens Against Tolls says Governor McGreevey promised to eliminate tolls during the 2001 campaign. In fact, the proposal was **Bret Schundler's** signature issue, and McGreevey responded to it in a variety of ways (*MTR* #317). In any case, the relevance of the governor's campaign promises is receding quickly, and the real needs of transportation in NJ are far more important. *Star-Ledger* polls from the 2001 race found the issue unpopular with New Jersey citizens because they are smart enough to understand that the money would have to come from another source if tolls were abolished.

Travel conditions and quality of life will be better for everyone in New Jersey if the debate sticks to solving real transportation problems. ❖

Schedule for MTA Fare Hike, Service Cuts Comes into View

Transit advocates slammed the MTA on Monday for announcing there would be **only one public hearing in New York City** in November on the agency's plans to cut transit service and raise fares and tolls for NYC MetroCard users, express bus and commuter rail riders and bridge and tunnel motorists. Hearing would also take place in the Hudson Valley and on Long Island. "I think it shows contempt for the riders," Straphangers Campaign attorney Gene Russianoff told the *Daily News*. Straphangers has written to the MTA requesting that a hearing be held in each borough of the city.

News reports said the MTA will be held November 8th, 9th and 10th, though the agency has not yet placed notices for the meetings on its web site.

Elected officials also criticized the plan. **Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro**, whose constituents face 50% hikes in express bus fares, said he was hopeful Staten Island would win a hearing. Mayor Bloomberg continued to send signals that he would be more active in the fare battle this time around. He said the MTA had not made its case for higher fares, but that if there are ground for them, hearings should be held around the city. When the MTA raised fares in 2003, the mayor was largely silent or else took a position that amounted to "sometimes prices go up."

Editorial boards at city dailies have also denounced the slim hearing schedule. The *Daily News* urged MTA leaders to fight harder in Albany and slammed the MTA board's cavalier attitude about public hearings.

MTA chair Peter Kalikow said a full set of hearings is unnecessary because base subway and bus fares will not rise, and that hearings are costly. ❖

NYSDOT Support for Innovative Planning Weak

An NYU Rudin Transportation Center and Institute for Civil Infrastructure Systems forum last week on joining land use and transportation planning focused on a set of "sustainable development strategy" projects established by the staff of the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council. The forum made clear that although NY State DOT has participated in the un-

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

dertakings, it has made no effort to prioritize funding to bring the planning conclusions to fruition, and still has a long way to go in changing its attitudes about its own planning role and transportation's place in the world.

Each sustainable development effort has sought consensus between municipalities, state agencies and other stakeholders to develop future land use and transportation plans. They have taken 2-3 years, and developed some innovative approaches to traffic congestion. Studies for Brooklyn's Coney Island and Long Island's East End are still underway. The Route 303 study in Orangetown (Rockland County) was finished in late 2002 (MTR # 438); Yorktown's (Westchester) Route 202/35/6 Bear Mountain Parkway study in 2003. Since completion, both towns have awaited implementation for the NYSDOT components, but little has happened. Only a few small scale recommendations like re-timing traffic signals and adding turn lanes have gotten through NYS DOT's pipeline.

Supervisors Thom Kleiner of Orangetown and Linda Cooper of Yorktown say the funding delays have made their constituencies skeptical that the studies will ever result in anything. Cooper noted that her residents would proclaim the study a success only after they were "**shown the money.**" Nothing concrete has happened to slow the projects down; the pace appears to simply reflect the general sluggishness of transportation projects in New York State. If NYS DOT wants such efforts to succeed, it ought to commit from the beginning to **expedited implementation** of its pieces of the puzzles.

Unfortunately, last week's forum seemed to confirm that NY State DOT is less than ready to take a strong role addressing transportation implications of land use. An audience member asked whether NYS DOT was prepared to employ its access management powers (permitting development driveways onto state roads) to affect land use in cases where it is working with a town on a general land use and transportation plan. Bob Dennison, chief of NY State DOT's Hudson Valley office, essentially answered no, DOT leaves land use issues to municipalities.

NYS DOT has been uninterested in letting this model of planning expand beyond the first few initiated by NYMTC some five years ago. One observer of the East End SEEDS process says NYS DOT Long Island staff attend meetings but are waiting for the process to fail.

Sustainable development strategy projects on-line www.202and6.com/home.html, www.orangetown.com nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/gravesend.html

The Riders and the Rebirth of City Transit

The **Straphangers Campaign** is marking its 25th years with an exhibit recounting transit rider advocacy campaigns since the 1970s at the **Municipal Art Society** in Manhattan.

The exhibit emphasizes the impact riders have had along with the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, other civic and advocacy groups and transit officials to win improvements on New York City buses and subways. It features subway ads, videotapes, leaflets and news articles that focus on past and current efforts to keep fares affordable, protect free speech on the subway, rebuild the system and more. The exhibit allows riders to share their views on current issues. It runs from September 8th to October 30th. For more information, see calendar section or visit www.straphangers.org.

RPA Looks Downtown

The Regional Plan Association released a report recently on the progress of Lower Manhattan's redevelopment. Notable transportation items in the report include:

- The **Coalition of 9/11 Families** filed suit last month to stop construction of the new PATH station, opposing the overlap of the WTC footprint by transit infrastructure.
- RPA questioned whether an \$81 million north-south underground pedestrian tunnel should be built from the PATH station to the Liberty Plaza area, in addition to the major east-west concourse that is planned. No north-south concourse existed in the original World Trade Center site, and RPA suggests that too much underground retail may negatively impact the surface street environment.
- Construction of the \$750 million **Fulton Street Transit Hub**, a project to untangle subway lines that run through the Broadway-Nassau-Fulton Street complex and to give mass transit a street presence, is supposed to start at the end of 2004, running to 2007. The South Ferry subway station renovation is also slated to be done in 2007. The terminal should eventually link to the Staten Island ferry terminal, also under renovation.
- The most cost effective alternative for **West Street** is construction of an **at-grade road**, rather than the highly contested and expensive tunnel. Official support for the latter seems to be waning.
- RPA recommends that any \$6 billion LIRR link from downtown to JFK benefit Brooklyn subway riders and be designed to eventually accommodate the 2nd Ave subway. However, getting these projects in synch will be a significant challenge, since RPA also notes that it is likely to take 20 years for the

Second Avenue line to reach Lower Manhattan. \$400 million is slated for LIRR downtown link in the MTA's proposed 2005-2009 capital program.

- An NYCDOT street management study is currently underway to analyze parking policies, the pedestrian environment, and truck idling. Still undecided is how to accommodate buses in the downtown area. For the full report, see www.rpa.org. ❖

JFK-Lower Manhattan Ferry ?

The Port Authority has issued a request for proposals for ferry service between Lower Manhattan and JFK airport. Proposals are due in November, though it is not clear when the PA hopes to initiate service.

It will be an interesting project to follow, because it could provide indications of the size of the market seeking a transit link between JFK and the downtown area. **Governor Pataki, Senator Schumer and business leaders** want to lavish scarce transit funding on a new tunnel for a commuter train from lower Manhattan to JFK and Long Island, but the rider demand for the project remains unproven.

It's possible the ferry service would include commuter stops in the Rockaways. The JFK slip would enable passengers to board the AirTrain at Lefferts Boulevard. It's unknown what fares would be. The Port Authority currently charges subway riders switching to AirTrain \$5 to travel around the airport. The PA has discussed a lower Manhattan-LaGuardia Airport boat for years but has never implemented it.

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Angry **NJ ferry riders** are fighting NY Waterway fare hikes, and attempted a one-day boycott on September 8 that was largely drowned out by the problems confronting train riders thanks to severe flooding that day. NY Waterway said its passenger volumes were higher than normal that day. Success of any rider action is unlikely, since there is limited public oversight of ferry fares, disgruntled boat riders have the option of debarking in favor of parallel PATH train or bus service (and the Hudson County light rail line has just reached Weehawken).

Mayor Bloomberg's new "mayor's management report" says ridership on private ferries is off significantly this year from fiscal 2003. Ferry use reached a high of 64,000 weekday riders last year but has fallen to just under 50,000 this year. The report attributes the decline to the re-opening of the World Trade Center PATH station, which now sees 33,000 weekday riders. That level is significantly ahead of Port Authority projections for returning riders. NY Waterway told the *NY Post* that its ridership is about where it was prior to Sept. 11, 2001, and that the company was confident of a strong market going forward.

New Rail Lines Doing Well

New Jersey Transit opened a new segment of its Hudson-Bergen light rail system, extending the line north from Hoboken station into Weehawken. Three new stations were opened — two on Hoboken's west side and one on the Weehawken waterfront. The extension is 1.6 miles in length. Work on a further section north from Weehawken continues — it will allow the line to reach Union City, West New York and North Bergen.

The line now sees about **17,000 riders per day**, according to New Jersey Transit. That level is about 13% higher than in mid-2003, and Transit says it expects weekday use to reach 20,000 next year.

A variety of options for extending the system to suburban areas in Bergen County and to the Meadows Xanadu site are under discussion, but no hard funding is in hand for now.

River Line: Defeating Low Expectations?

Two other new rail lines are attracting more riders than officials initially projected. The *Trentonian* reported recently that New Jersey's newest light rail, Camden-Trenton River Line, has nearly met ridership goals for its first year despite just opening in March. The one-year goal was 5,900 one-way riders, and the new line showed an average of **5,600 in mid-August**. The train provides good transfers to NJ Transit and SEPTA commuter trains in Trenton and is close to the Philadelphia-NJ PATCO line in Camden. The paper said the line is already attracting business to the area, especially to Riverside, where a variety of competing development proposals have emerged.

Airtrain Catching On

The *NY Post* reported that the ridership for AirTrain, the light-rail connection between LIRR trains, subways and JFK Airport terminals, is growing every month. The service that began has grown from about 5,000 daily riders last winter to **8,000 this July and August**. The peak was set on July 2 with 10,627 rides, and the Port Authority spokesman Pasquale DiFulco states that the train is on track to meet its ridership projection for the first year at 11,000 riders per day.

Declaring Fiscal Stability, Suozzi Hikes Bus Budget

Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi released his budget for 2005 last Monday, with funding to Long Island Bus proposed at **\$10.5 million**. Suozzi said he was doubling the county's bus contribution, though the doubling is more in line with what he proposed last year than in what the bus agency in fact received. Last year, Suozzi proposed \$5.9 million to support bus service, and the county legisla-

ture increased it to \$7.3 million (additional money the county said it would release to Long Island Bus in mid-year if needed is still being negotiated between the bus agency and the county).

The state contribution to LI Bus was \$34 million in 2003-2004, and it was not cut in this year's budget.

In releasing his budget, Suozzi declared Nassau's budget crisis at an end. It's important that Nassau's 105,000 daily bus riders are sharing somewhat in the good news, since they have suffered severe county cuts and faced the **prospect of drastic service cuts annually since 1999**. In 2000 former County Executive Thomas Gulotta cut Nassau's \$20.7 million commitment to \$14 million, and the 2001 budget chopped it by another \$7 million (*MTR #296*). Until now, the county contribution remained around \$7 million for the following years, despite steady ridership growth.

There has been some suggestion that Suozzi's largesse is related to elections coming up next year. If true, that is not bad in the short run for Nassau bus riders. Because Nassau approves its budget in the fall, Suozzi will have another executive budget to propose before November 2005.

Protecting Young Pedestrians

The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) recently announced that **100 schools** will open with brand new sidewalks this year. The new program was developed by NYC Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshal to repair and add sidewalks to schools. The sites were selected in community districts where the city's sidewalk contractors were already working, and were chosen independently of that DOT's new Safe Routes to School program.

In March, the DOT launched Safe Routes to Schools to install traffic calming infrastructure around schools with dangerous bike and pedestrian environments. Initial projects for that initiative are still in the works. For more on the NYC Safe Routes program, see Transportation Alternatives website: transalt.org/press/askta/040330.html.



In its first year, New Jersey's "Safe Streets to Schools" program, run by NJ DOT's Local Aid office, awarded \$5.6 million in 45 grants to municipalities seeking to improve walking environments around schools. However, the program appears to have been launched at the cost of reducing state aid for other bike and pedestrian programs. The state reduced its regular local aid bike-pedestrian program by about \$5 million from 2003 to 2004. ❖

Calendar

September 8-October 30. Exhibit: "The Riders and the Rebirth of City Transit: 25 Years of Transit Advocacy by the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign." Municipal Art Society. 457 Madison Ave., Manhattan. 212-935-3960. www.straphangers.org.

September 23, 10am. NYC City Council hearing on legislation (Intro 98-a) to prohibit sale and operation of motorized scooters. 250 Broadway, 14th floor, Manhattan. 212-788-7210. www.nycouncil.info.

September 23, Noon. NYC Transit Riders Council [monthly meeting](#). 347 Madison Ave., 5th floor, Manhattan. 212-878-7087.

September 28, 6pm. "Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health." Auto-Free NY lecture by Rutgers professor John Pucher. Conference Room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street. Manhattan. 212-475-3394. www.auto-free.org

October 13, 6-8pm. Exhibit: *3 On The Subway*. Opening Reception. Museum of the City of New York. 1220 5th Ave. Manhattan. www.mcny.com

October 14, 10:00am. NYC DOT public hearing: Reconstruction of 22 Pedestrian Bridges in All Five Boroughs of NYC. Spector Hall, 22 Reade Street, Main Floor, Manhattan. 212-442-7033.

October 15, 8:30am. Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions annual environmental congress: "Beyond Home Rule - Protecting the Environment Through Regional Planning." Mercer County Community College, 1200 Old Trenton Road, West Windsor. 973-539-7547. www.anjec.org

October 19, 6:30pm. Public meeting to start Kosciuszko Bridge replacement project environmental impact study. NY State DOT. Martin Luther HS. 60-02 Maspeth Ave., Queens. 212-532-4175.

October 21, 10am-2pm. Nassau County budget hearing, including bus operating budget. One West Street, Mineola, 5th floor. 516-571-6226.

October 25, Full legislative session and 2005 Budget Vote. Nassau County. 5th Floor, One West Street, Mineola. 516-571-6226.

[more calendar entries at www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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